



Edward Vibart.

# THE SEPOY MUTINY

AS SEEN BY A SUBALTERN

FROM DELHI TO LUCKNOW



COLONEL EDWARD VIBART

LATE 15TH BENGAL CAVALRY

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS

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## P R E F A C E.

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THAT portion of the present volume which refers to the Sepoy Revolt at Delhi originally appeared some months ago in an abridged form in the pages of the *Cornhill Magazine*. Since its publication in that periodical, the author has received many suggestions to publish his personal recollections of those eventful days in book form ; and, although feeling naturally reluctant to add another volume of Mutiny reminiscences to the large number which have already appeared, yet as the writer is now one of the very few still alive who was an actual eye-witness of the stirring episodes connected with

the Delhi outbreak, and possibly the only surviving officer of the garrison in Delhi when the Mutiny broke out, perhaps the present little book, narrating his adventures on that memorable occasion, together with his subsequent experiences of the campaign of 1857-58, from Delhi to Lucknow, may not be considered altogether devoid of interest by the general reader.

An interesting chapter by P. V. Luke, Esq., C.I.E., giving the true version of the so-called "fateful telegram," despatched by the youthful signaller at Delhi to his brother signallers at Umballa (published in *Macmillan's Magazine* for October, 1897), just as the insurgents were about to take possession of cantonments, and which, not without good reason, is popularly supposed to have saved India, is also, by the courteous permission of the author and publishers, added to the narrative.

And lastly, for the benefit of those readers

who are unacquainted with the particulars of the Meerut outbreak—which preceded that at Delhi by only a few hours—and thus to present a connected account of both these historical events in a handy form, a supplementary chapter, extracted from a most interesting little work entitled “Mutiny Memoirs,” published in 1891, by the Pioneer Press in India, from the graphic pen of Colonel A. R. D. Mackenzie, C.B., is likewise inserted at the end of the volume.

With reference to the illustrations—which it is hoped may contribute to whatever interest the letter-press may possess—the majority are copies of some valuable photographs which have been placed at the disposal of the author by an old friend, George Ricketts, Esq., C.B., late of the Bengal Civil Service, formerly member of the Board of Revenue for the North-West Provinces of India, a name honourably associated in the military annals of the Mutiny with his

## EDWARD VIBART.

October, 1898.

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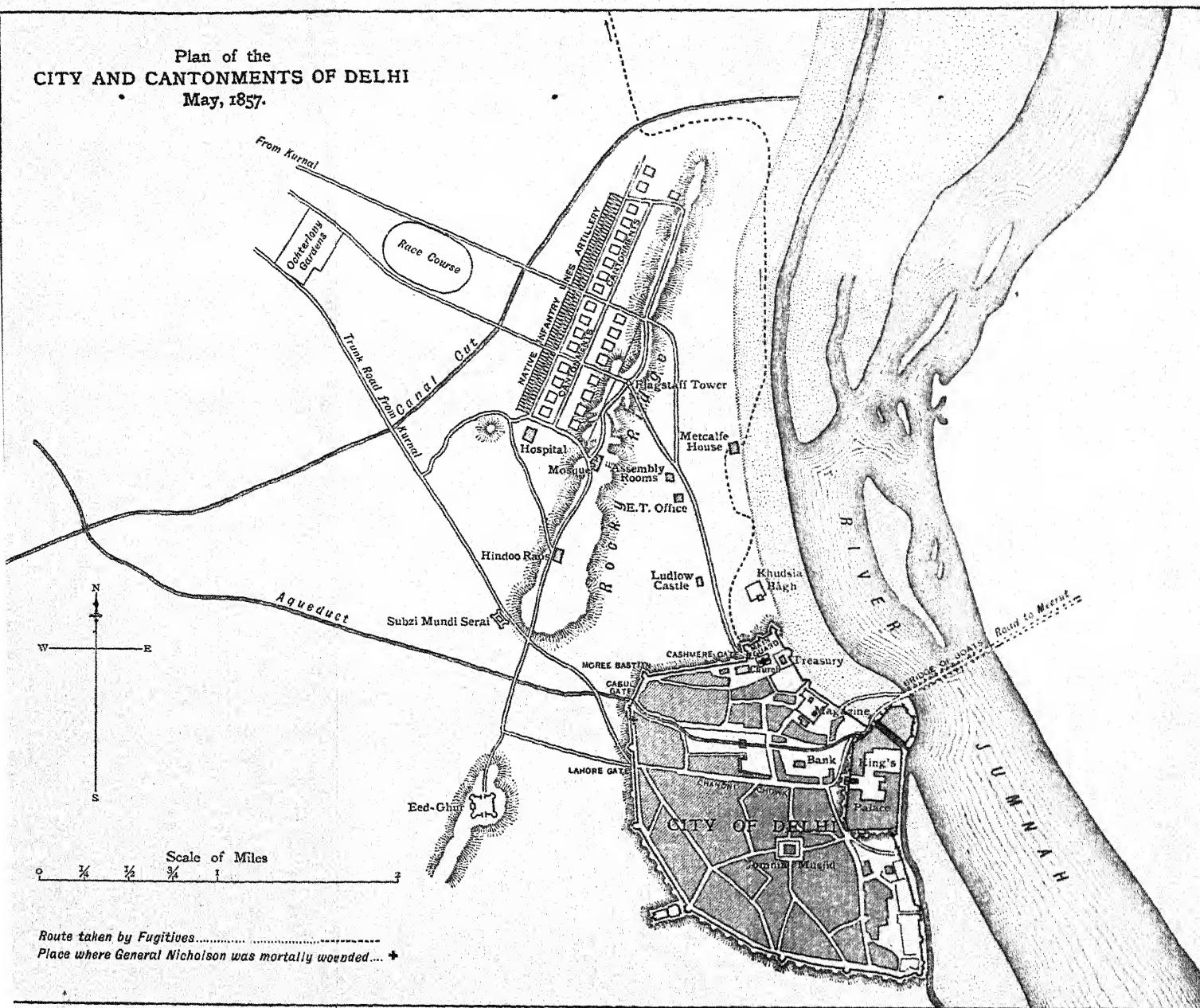
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Plan of the  
CITY AND CANTONMENTS OF DELHI  
May, 1857.



Route taken by Fugitives.....  
Place where General Nicholson was mortally wounded.... +

Scale of Miles  
0  $\frac{1}{4}$   $\frac{1}{2}$   $\frac{3}{4}$  1



# THE SEPOY MUTINY

*AS SEEN BY A SUBALTERN:*

FROM DELHI TO LUCKNOW.

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## CHAPTER I.

### DELHI.

IN a work recently published by Sir Hugh Gough, V.C., G.C.B., entitled "Old Memories," that distinguished officer has given a very interesting account of the outbreak of the great sepoy revolt at Meerut on the evening of May 10, 1857—the first station it will be recollected where the native troops of the Bengal Army broke out into open insurrection—and the subsequent unmolested march of the mutineers, flushed with triumph, to Delhi.

As I was at that time a young subaltern in

one of the native infantry regiments stationed at the latter place, and took an active part in many of the tragic events which happened inside the city of Delhi on the arrival there on the following morning of the mutinous soldiery from Meerut, it has occurred to me that an account of my personal recollections of that ever-memorable day May 11, 1857, may (apart from any interest which may attach to the narrative itself) form a fitting sequel to the sanguinary episode at Meerut, so graphically described by Sir Hugh Gough; and although it is true that upwards of forty years have passed over my head since their occurrence, still as the events I am about to relate were of a nature to make a very permanent impression on my memory, and I have also in my possession a number of letters which I wrote to my relatives in England at the time of the outbreak, carefully preserved by them ever since, I feel I am in a position to give a full and trustworthy description of all that took place, not only inside the city of Delhi, but also in the Delhi garrison itself. How my companions and I

ever escaped with our lives on that occasion is no less a matter of exceeding wonder and astonishment to myself than it will be to those readers who care to peruse this narrative; and albeit a general outline of the sepoy insurrection at Delhi has long become a matter of historical record, yet, as many of the details connected therewith, as well as the story of the escape of our party of fugitives up to the time of final rescue by Lieutenants Gough and Mackenzie, have never hitherto been fully published, I am inclined to think that, notwithstanding the length of time which has since elapsed, they may still prove of general interest.

Before commencing my narrative, perhaps a short description of Delhi and its environs may not be amiss.

The modern city, as is well known, stands on the western or right bank of the river Jumna, and in the year 1857 numbered a resident native population of about 160,000, the majority being Mahomedans. There were also dwelling inside the city, some hundreds of Eurasians and native Christians, in addition to a large European

community, such as the missionaries and traders, civil engineers and clerks in government employ ; but the number of official Europeans actually resident within the walls was inconsiderable, Captain Douglas, the commandant of the Palace Guards ; the Reverend Mr. Jennings, the military chaplain, and a few conductors and sergeants attached to the Arsenal, usually called the " Magazine," being the only ones so far as I can recollect. The city itself is surrounded by a high loopholed wall between six and seven miles in circumference, strengthened by bastions with intervening martello towers and nine massive gates. Each of these gates is known by a distinct name, such as the Cashmere and Moree Gates on the northern face, the Lahore Gate on the western face, and so on ; but as our story is mainly concerned with the first-named gate, a fuller description of this entrance to the city will be given later on. Round the entire extent of the walls is a wide and deep ditch, with a short glacis in front. So much for the fortifications.

The principal public edifices are the King's

Palace, and the Jumma Musjid, the latter reputed to be the largest and handsomest place of mussulman worship in India, whilst the former has been described by Heber as a kingly residence far surpassing in grandeur the Kremlin at Moscow.

At this period the titular throne of Delhi was occupied by His Majesty, Bahadur Shah, the octogenarian representative of the once mighty dynasty of the great Moghul; and here, within the walls of this magnificent building, surrounded by debauched and unscrupulous courtiers, and passing the chief portion of his time in the society of the ladies of his harem, he used to live with regal honours in the enjoyment of a pension of £120,000 per annum. Mention must also be made of the renowned Chandnee Chowk, or street of silver, the main thoroughfare of business in Delhi, which, commencing at the Lahore Gate, runs due east through the heart of the city to within a short distance of the imposing walls of red sand-stone sixty feet high, which encircle the King's Palace. Here precious stones, the

most exquisite embroidered shawls, and gold and silver ornaments of the finest workmanship, were procurable in abundance, and I fancy there were few cities in India at this period which could have rivalled the wealth of the bazaars of Delhi, or excelled the manufacturing skill of its inhabitants. On the north-east of the palace, and separated from it by a narrow branch of the Jumna, whose waters washed the base of its lofty walls, stood the old fort of Selimgurh. This fortress was connected with the palace by a bridge, but except for its commanding position, it was not such a formidable work as its appearance seemed to indicate, as it had been allowed to fall out of repair for many years past. Spanning the broad stream of the Jumna, close under the walls of this fort, was the bridge of boats, and stretching across the plain on the opposite bank, lined by a growth of shady trees, the broad metalled road to Meerut, distant thirty-six miles, could be clearly discerned.

The Arsenal, or Magazine, replete with vast stores of ammunition and muskets, besides two complete siege trains and innumerable field

guns, was also situated within the limits of the city walls, lining the river front close to the Calcutta Gate, but was not provided with a single European soldier to defend it. Close at hand were the spacious grounds of the Government College ; next came the Civil Treasury, and further on the premises of the *Delhi Gazette Press*, at that time the leading newspaper in Upper India. In this locality also stood St. James' Church, fronting a large open space adjoining the Cashmere Gate and Main Guard.

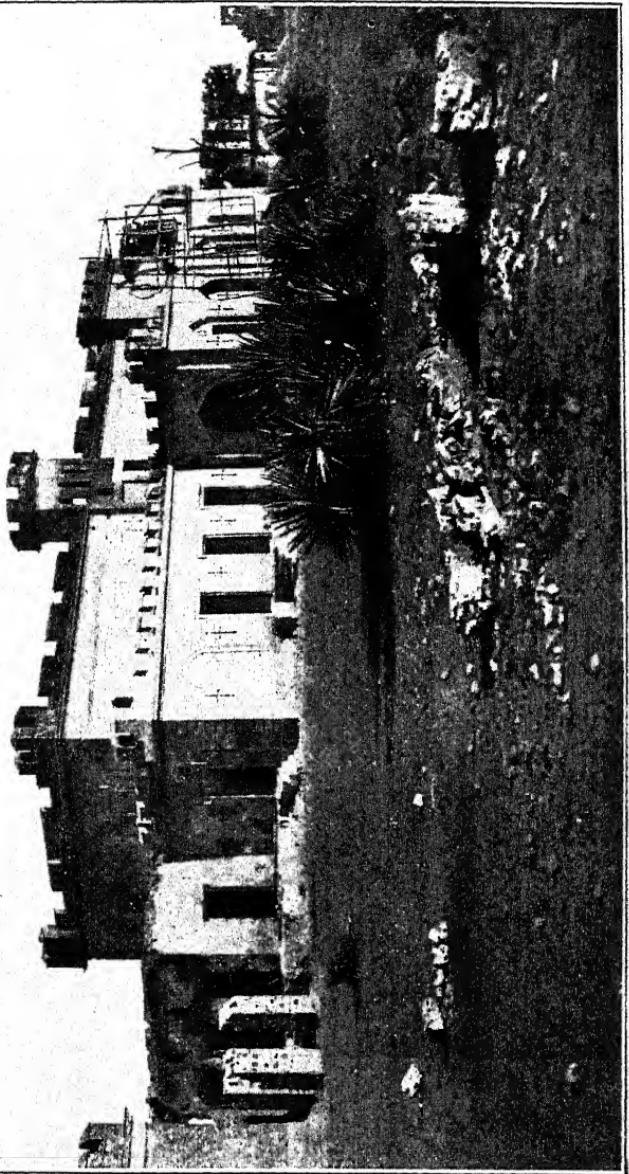
Having mentioned all the localities necessary for the main purpose of this narrative, so far as the interior of the city is concerned, it now becomes needful, in order that the several incidents connected with the outbreak may be thoroughly understood, to give a brief description of the military cantonments and their relative position to the city of Delhi.

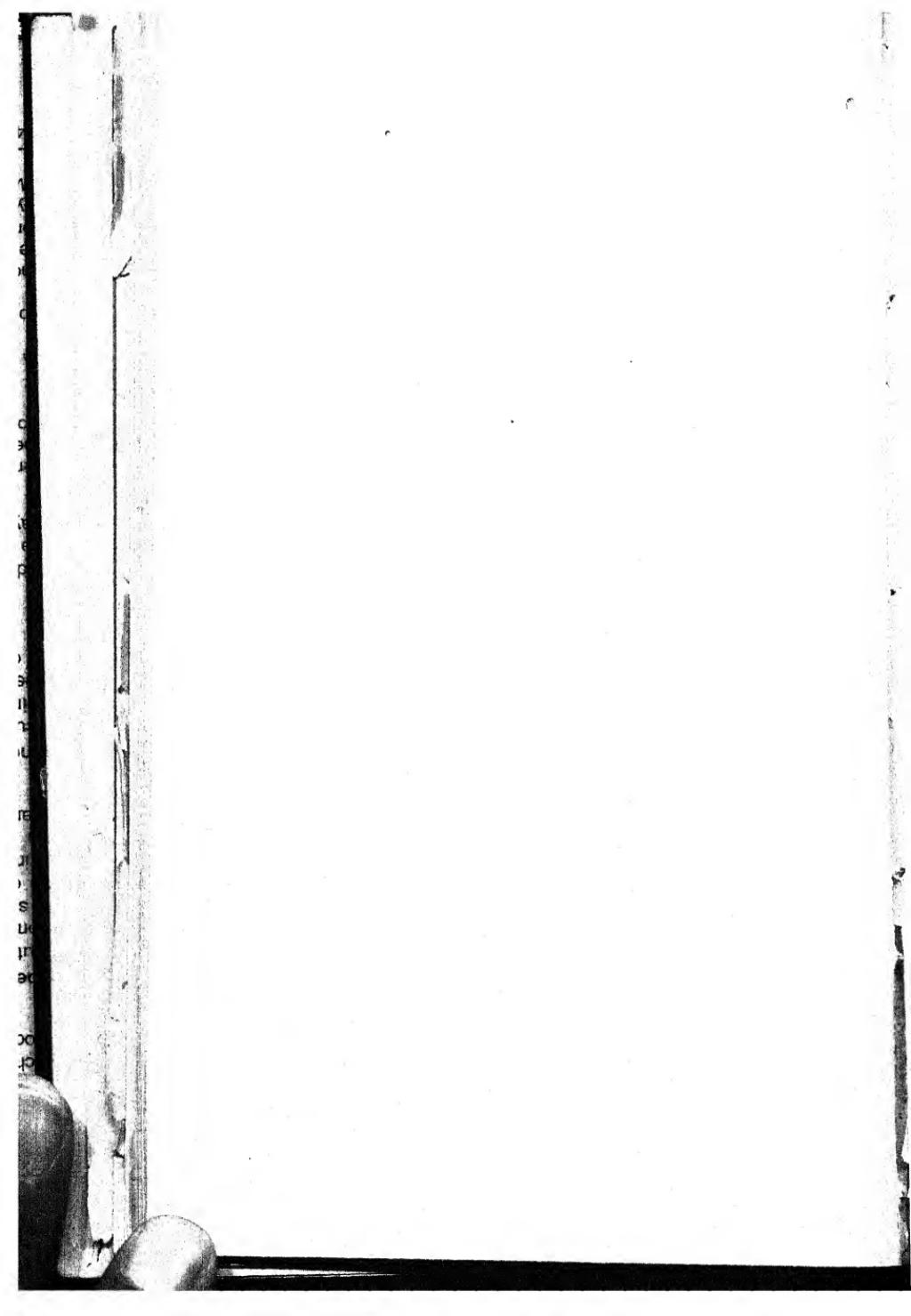
These, roughly speaking, were situated about two miles to its north-west, and extended for about the same distance along the base of an elevated ridge of rocks, which latter, running obliquely to the city walls, formed the south-

eastern boundary of cantonments in that direction. The lines of the several sepoy regiments, together with a field battery of native artillery which constituted the garrison, were built in one long line parallel to the ridge, and with their respective parade-grounds fronted north-west, a certain space between the lines and the foot of the ridge being reserved for the bungalows of the British officers. The right, or northern extremity of the cantonment, rested on the river Jumna, from which point it was distant from the city about three miles, whilst its left rear, which abutted on the above-mentioned rocky ridge opposite the Cabul Gate, was not much more than a mile from the city walls. Thus the mean distance from the city, as before stated, was about two miles. The north-west boundary of the cantonment was formed by a deep canal cutting, which, after running along the entire frontage of the station just beyond the regimental parade-grounds, took a slight bend to the right, and then fell into the river. There were several roads which led from different parts of cantonments towards the

city of Delhi, the two principal of which, passing over the crest of the ridge, united at a point some eight hundred yards below it, and thence proceeded in almost a straight line to the city, which it entered by way of the Cashmere Gate. On the river side of this road, and standing on its banks, was Metcalfe House, the residence of Sir T. Metcalfe, Bart., at that time joint-magistrate of Delhi, with its extensive park stretching for nearly a mile along the edge of the Jumna. Farther on, on the same side of the road, right up to the city walls, lay a number of suburban gardens, in the midst of which stood the Kudsiyá Bágħ, the old summer palace of former Moghul sovereigns. These gardens were overgrown with thick shrubbery, and in many places were nothing more or less than a tangled mass of dense brushwood. The reader will do well to bear this fact in mind in order to clearly understand the narrative later on. On the other, or western side of the road, were a number of houses standing in their own grounds, inhabited for the most part by civilians and other non-military residents, the chief

amongst them being Ludlow Castle, a fine castellated mansion, the residence of Mr. Fraser, the Commissioner of Delhi. Not far from Ludlow Castle and nearer to the cantonment, was the electric telegraph office, and just beyond the latter, close to the junction of the roads above alluded to, were the assembly rooms and the shop of Mr. Marshal, the principal European merchant at Delhi. It only remains to add that the grand trunk road from Kurnaul and the Punjab lay a short distance to the west of cantonments, which, after passing through two and a half miles of suburbs and ancient edifices, entered the city through the Lahore Gate.





## CHAPTER II.

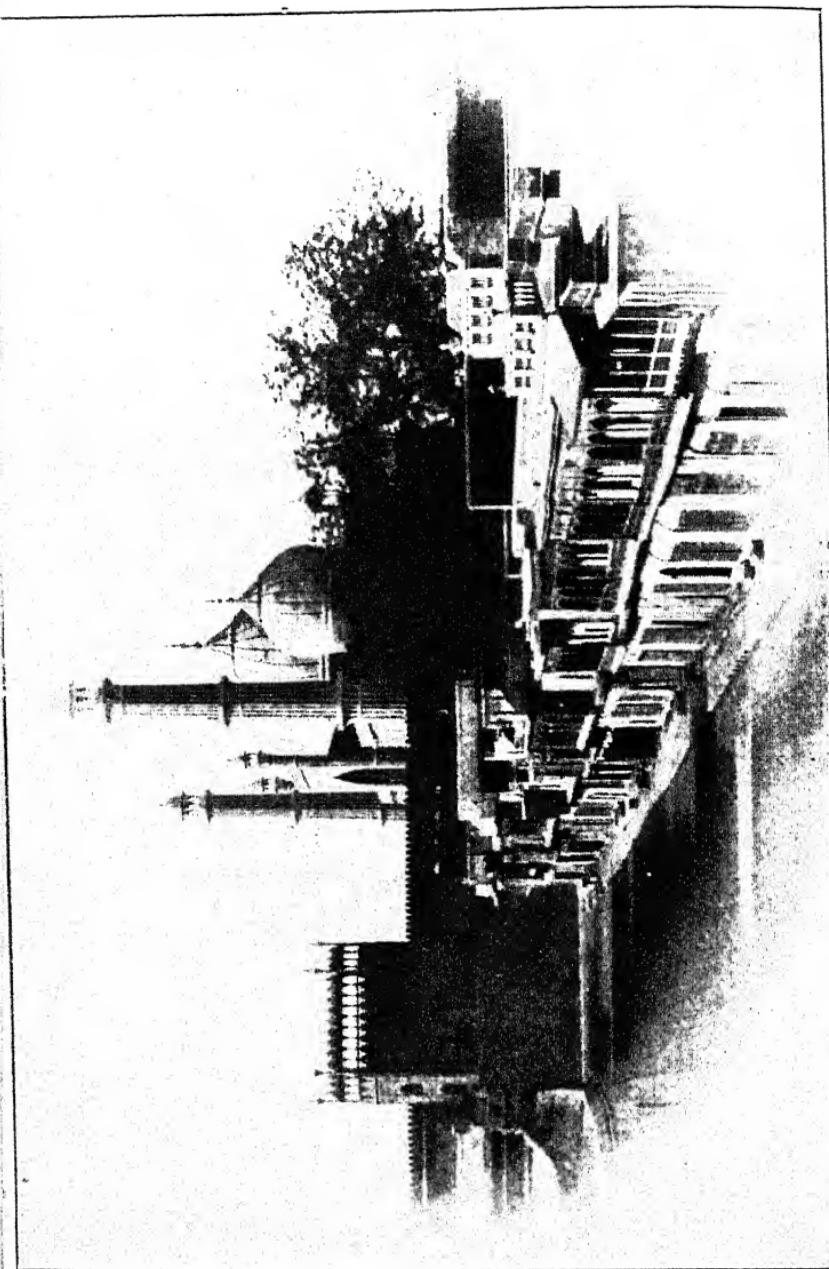
## THE OUTBREAK.

AND now, without further preliminary, I will venture to commence my story.

On the eventful morning of May 11, 1857, the whole of the troops composing the Delhi garrison, consisting of the 38th, 54th, and 74th regiments of native infantry, with Captain H. P. de Teissier's battery of native artillery, were assembled together on parade at an early hour, under the personal command of Brigadier Graves, commanding the station, for the purpose of hearing read out the general order relating to the execution of Issuree Pandy, a jemadar in one of the native infantry regiments at Barrackpore, who for gross insubordination and mutiny against the Government had been

condemned to be executed. This done, each corps returned to its respective parade-ground, and was then dismissed. The British officers of my own regiment (54th N.I.) for the most part repaired to the regimental mess-house, where, after partaking of a light breakfast, called in India *chota haziree*, and laughing and conversing together until nearly eight o'clock, we separated for the day and returned to our own houses. About an hour later the orderly havildar of my company came running up to my bungalow to report that the regiment had received orders to march down instantly to the city, as some troopers of the 3rd Light Cavalry had that morning arrived from Meerut, and were creating disturbances. Hurrying on my uniform, and ordering my pony to be saddled, I without loss of time galloped down to the parade-ground, where I found the regiment falling in by companies and preparing to start. Colonel Ripley, our commandant, who had not long previously been transferred from the 1st European Bengal Fusiliers to assume command of the regiment, and who

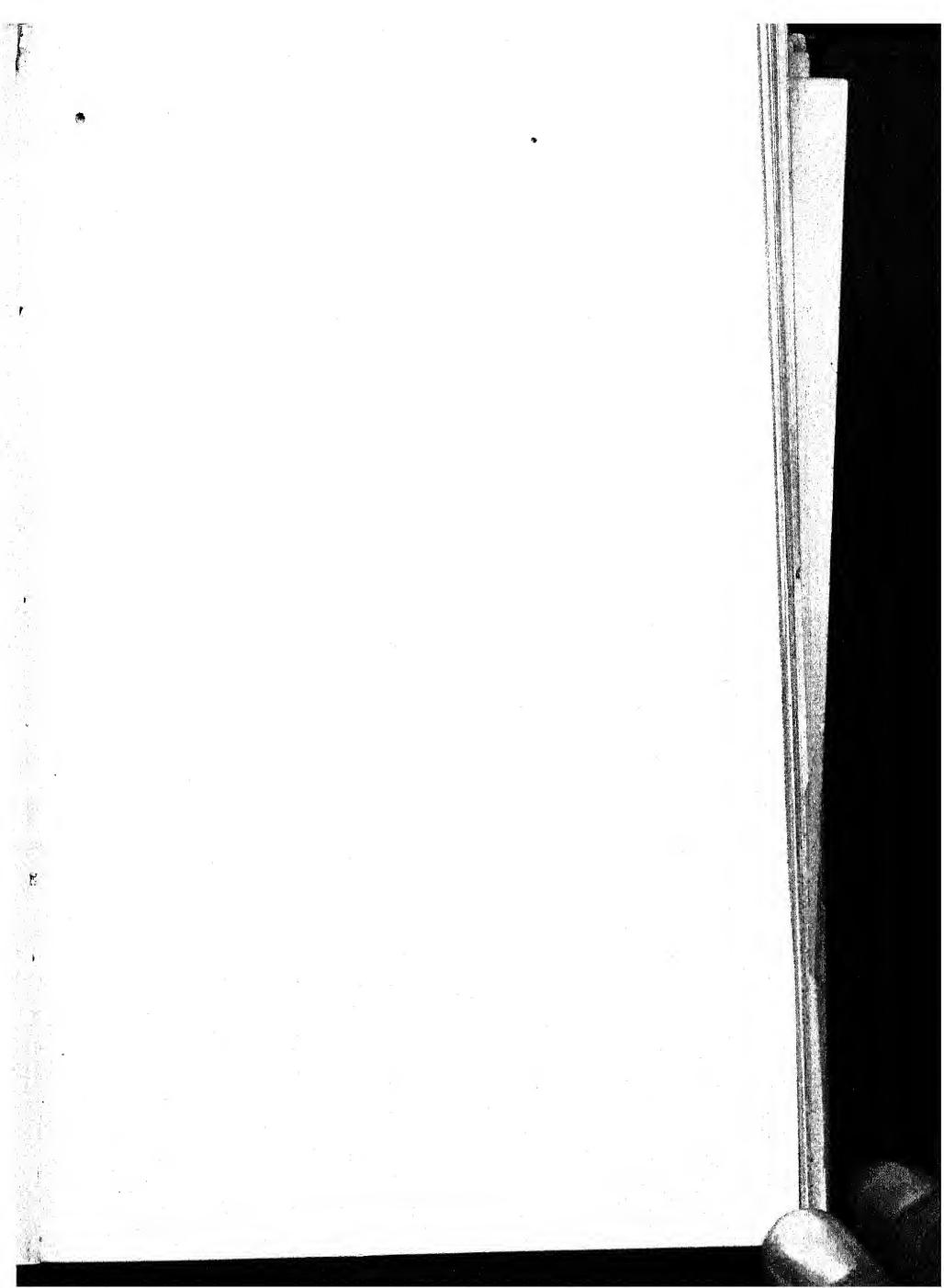


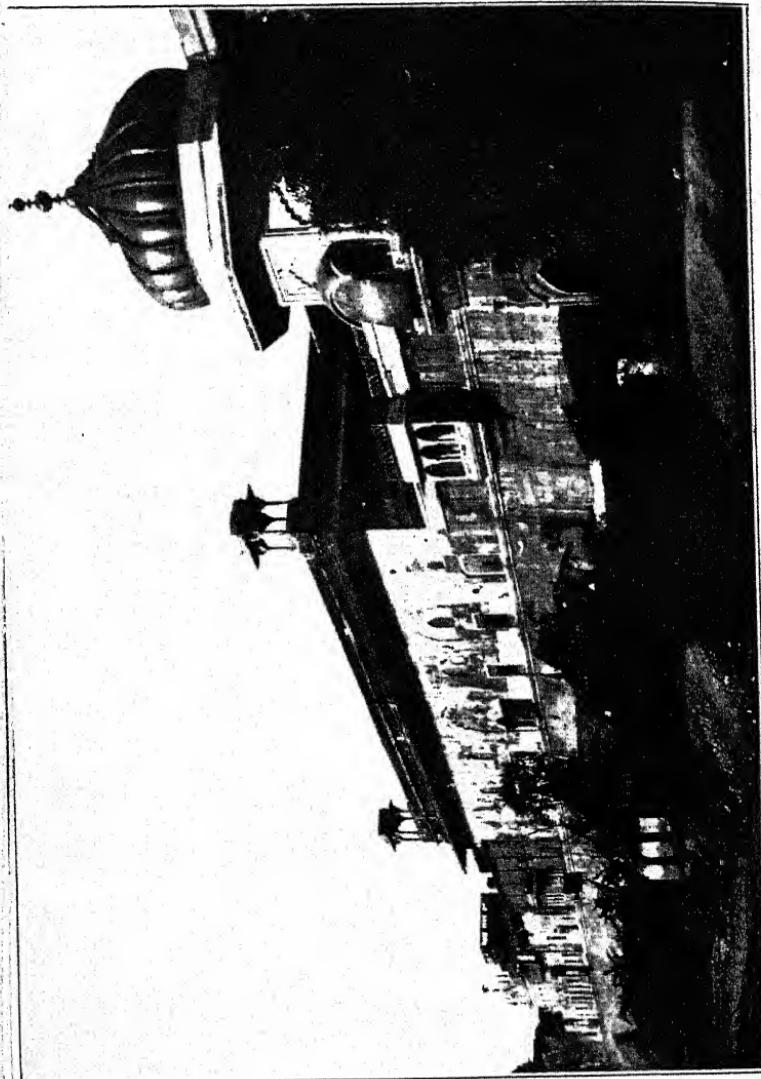


appeared much excited, was already there and giving directions. The Grenadiers and No. 1 (the latter my company) were ordered to proceed under the command of Major Paterson to the artillery lines, in order to escort a couple of guns to the city. We accordingly marched off at once; the rest of the regiment, with the band playing, followed shortly after. On arriving at the artillery lines, Major Paterson was informed by Captain de Teissier that the guns were not quite ready, but that if we proceeded quietly towards the city, they would overtake us at a gallop. Major Paterson, however, determined to wait. The regiment, meanwhile, with Colonel Ripley at their head, left us behind, and proceeded toward the Cashmere Gate and Main Guard.

Before proceeding further with my narrative, it would be as well to give a more detailed description of the Cashmere Gate, as this place was destined to be the scene of our operations for the remainder of this eventful day. This gate, like most fortified gates, is approached by two roadways cut through the glacis, one for

entry and the other for exit, each of which, passing under a separate arched entrance, leads into a small fortified enclosure, called the Main Guard, which was always garrisoned by a detachment of fifty sepoys under a European officer. It consisted on this day of men of the 38th N.I., under Lieutenant Procter of that corps. This duty, which was taken in turn by each regiment in the garrison, and lasted for a week at a time, was looked upon as a rather irksome one by the European officers, as the officer in command of the detachment was not allowed to quit the precincts of the Main Guard, and had always to be dressed in uniform. Mr. Plaice, the manager of the *Delhi Gazette*, who lived close by, I remember, used frequently to ask us subalterns to dine with him, and, as this was the only relaxation we were able to enjoy during our tour of duty, it was much appreciated by all, so much so, that one of the questions invariably asked by the relieving officer of his brother sub., before he marched back to cantonments, was, "How often did you dine with old Plaice?" But to return.





THE KING'S PALACE, DELHI—RIVER FRONT.

Running round the entire extent of the Main Guard was a low verandah, inside which were the quarters occupied by the sepoys; whilst on top of the bastion, which is ascended from below by means of a ramp, or sloping stone causeway, and situated immediately over the gateway, was a small two-roomed house, set apart for the British officer on duty. The distance of the Cashmere Gate from cantonments is about two miles, and, although not the nearest one to it, yet, as previously explained, the main road from the station to the city passed through this gate. From the Main Guard two other wooden gates afforded ingress to the native city, one leading direct to the Civil Treasury, whilst the other, passing into an open space where the church stands, continues thence in a straight line to the magazine and king's palace.

After a delay of about twenty minutes we were joined by the two guns, under the command of Lieutenant Wilson, and our two companies, with the guns, then proceeded on as fast as possible to the city. We were still

some distance off when the sound of musketry was distinctly heard; and now, as the church tower came in view, we could plainly see, from the smoke arising around it, that our regiment was actively engaged in that locality. Pushing on with all speed, we shortly after met Captain Wallace of the 74th N.I., the field officer of the week, coming out of the Cashmere Gate and riding back towards cantonments. He implored us for "God's sake" to hurry on as fast as possible, as all the 54th officers were being shot down by cavalry troopers, and their men were making no effort to defend them. On hearing this startling news, Major Paterson desired me to halt and load. The two guns then advanced through the gate, followed by the infantry. At this moment the body of our unfortunate colonel was carried out, literally hacked to pieces. One arm just below the shoulder was almost severed. Such a fearful sight I never beheld. The poor man was still alive, and, though scarcely able to articulate, I distinctly gathered from the few words he gasped out, that we had no chance against